

CITY OF BURLINGTON, VT **OPEN SPACE PROTECTION PLAN**

Natural Areas



Recreation



Open Space



Adopted by the Burlington City Council: 30 October 2000

City of Burlington, VT

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OPEN SPACE PROTECTION PLAN

October 2000



**Prepared under the direction of the
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Open Space Protection in Burlington

An Executive Summary

The natural environment is a chief ingredient in defining Burlington's character - making it one of the most attractive and inviting small cities in the country. Burlington's citizens, non-profits, and city government have a proud tradition of protecting its sense of place, natural environment, open spaces, and recreational opportunities.

However, open space in Burlington is dwindling. Between 1960 and 1980, open space decreased by 800 acres, or 12% of the city's total land area. While larger developments downtown and on the waterfront receive most of the attention, smaller developments are slowly consuming remaining open space, and encroaching upon important natural and recreational systems highly valued by the community. Neighborhood opposition to new development is on the increase out of fear of a threat to the city's quality of life. As needed growth continues, a comprehensive plan to protect the city's most vulnerable natural areas and significant open spaces becomes a necessity.

Recent studies throughout the country have debunked the myth that conservation and development are inherently at odds. The fact is that open space conservation is good for everyone - residents, property owners, visitors, and businesses alike - and the bottom line. This is a fact that Burlington clearly recognizes and has long benefited.

It was for these reasons that in 1997 the Burlington City Council passed a resolution calling for the creation of "a plan to protect important natural areas and open spaces."

The goals of this Plan, as adapted by the Conservation Board from the *1996 Burlington Municipal Development Plan*, are as follows:

1) Protect and preserve natural areas and open spaces of local, regional, and statewide significance for the benefit of future generations.

- 2) Maintain and improve the integrity of natural and recreational systems within the City.
- Protect, maintain, and enhance the City's urban forest, including both large patches of woods and wooded corridors/treebelts that provide places of refuge and travel corridors for wildlife and people.
 - Protect the shorelines and waters of Lake Champlain, the Winooski River, and other water sources from damage and degradation.
 - Preserve scenic viewpoints and viewsheds.
 - Increase the number and quality of small urban open spaces, especially in underserved neighborhoods of the city.
- 3) Guide development into the city center and neighborhood activity centers.
- 4) Ensure long-term stewardship and appropriate public access to natural areas and open space, including improved opportunities for pedestrian access and interaction throughout the City.

Open space protection in Burlington embraces the reality that not all lands can or even should be protected from development. As a regional growth center, Burlington must find a balance between conservation and continued development that addresses the needs of the City's diverse population - present and future. By encouraging and accommodating more development, and at higher densities than in surrounding communities, Burlington can also play a very important role in protecting open space and working lands throughout the region. The important thing is to make smart choices based on understanding the resources important to the community's future, and how they work together as part of a more complex system.



Burlington's Open Space Protection Plan consists of three main components:

1) A **Vision** where natural areas, parklands, and greenbelts are physically integrated into the urban fabric of the city in order to compliment development with land conservation. Burlington's "vision" embraces two forms of open space that encompass the character of an urban place within a distinctively natural landscape – Significant Natural Areas and Urban Greenspaces.

Significant Natural Areas are the specific focus of this plan, and include a unique collection of features and resources that hold regional significance as natural systems and open land, serve to define the character of Burlington, and are at the foundation of the natural systems that support the city.

Significant Natural Areas:

- Lake Champlain Shoreline
- Winooski River / Intervale
- Englesby Brook / Ravine
- Centennial Brook / Woods
- Natural Heritage
- Surface Waters



Centennial Woods Natural Area

Urban Greenspaces are especially important to Burlington for softening densely developed neighborhoods, creating an aesthetic within the city, and providing small areas of refuge from the urban hardscape. While not within the mandate and scope of this effort, this plan attempts to offer a framework for establishing the significance of these "Urban Open Spaces" within the city. Further evaluation and study in this area is necessary.

Urban Greenspaces:

- Neighborhood Greenspaces
- Urban Waterfront
- Treebelts
- Recreational Linkages & Trails



Starr Farm Community Gardens

2) A working **Inventory of Open Spaces** and their important attributes.

This inventory represents the most comprehensive approach to-date for cataloging and characterizing city open spaces and their attributes of interest to the public. The Inventory has two components: a map (Burlington Open Space 1999), and a table (Land Inventory) further describing each of these sites. The Land Inventory, along with the Geography of Open Space, will be used by the City as tools to guide the prioritization and protection of sites.

3) A **Plan of Action** that proposes a comprehensive land conservation program for the City through three complimentary approaches:

a) Conservation Education to improve the public's familiarity and appreciation of Burlington's natural areas, to communicate the importance of open space protection, and to encourage public participation in the protection process.

b) Proactive Conservation that identifies sites of the highest priority for protection, and offers the mechanisms and resources to set these lands aside as a legacy to future generations. The keystones to this strategy are the establishment of proactive Conservation Legacy Program which:

- Prioritizes lands that are most important and suitable for long-term protection based on the City's open space vision and the presence of important natural or recreational features ;
- Creates a land conservation fund - sustained in-part with dedicated City funding – set aside towards the costs associated with the purchase and long-term protection of open land; and,
- Ensures planning for the long-term stewardship of conservation lands under City ownership.



Lone Rock Point

c) Further Planning & Improved Development Review to act as a safety net to protect specific resources and features from the adverse impacts that may be associated with nearby development. Proposed recommendations include:

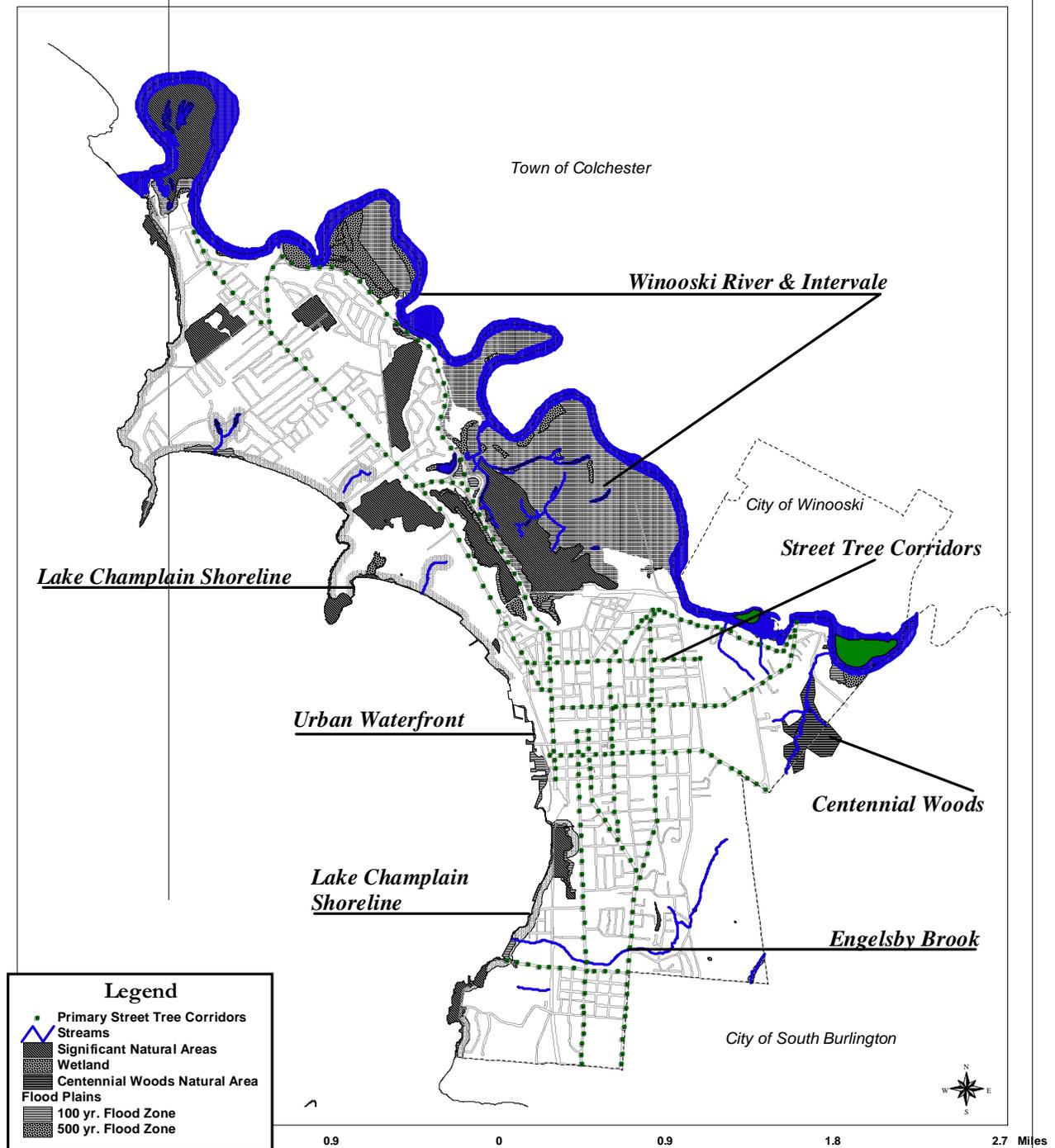
- Inclusion of major policy recommendations in City Master Plan
- Development of related resource information and area plans
- Revised Major Impact Review based on open space protection priorities.
- Modifications to Recreation/ Conservation/Open Space zoning districts.
- Creation of Design Review criteria specific to natural features.
- Defining "Buildable Area" for the purposes of calculating allowable density outside of city growth centers.
- Revised Subdivision Ordinance
- Assessment of Impact Fees for open space.
- Use of the Official Map for high priority sites for protection.

No single component can stand alone as an effective long-term strategy, but together, they create a comprehensive approach for open space protection. This framework is designed to be flexible, so that it can evolve with the needs and priorities of the City of Burlington as they change over time.



North Shore Wetland

2000 Burlington Open Space Protection Plan



The Geography of Open Space